

Handwriting Background

Handwriting, like fingerprints, contains a combination of characteristics a forensic scientist looks for when he is trying to identify handwriting in letters, will receipts, checks, and ransom notes. One of the first things the forensic scientist looks for is the way the lines form the letters. He looks at the slant of the letters. Some people slant their letters forward, others backward, and others write straight up and down. A forensic scientist also looks to see if people make ornaments such as circles, how they space between letters and words, how they dot their i's and cross their t's. The scientist also looks at spelling, punctuation, and grammar. All of these characteristics are useful in identifying the writing of a letter or document.

When a forensic scientist suspects a person in a forgery case, one of the first things he does is to get a handwriting sample from that suspect. This sample is called an exemplar. Usually, the scientist tries to get the suspect to write the same text as the suspected forged document with the same type of writing instrument as the forgery (pencil, ballpoint pen, fountain pen, marker, etc.). The scientist will dictate the letter to the suspect, making sure not to suggest spelling or punctuation. He will dictate the sentences several times, changing the speed in which he dictates each time. By doing this, the forensic scientist has a good chance of getting a normal handwriting sample from the suspect, and the suspect won't have a chance to try to write differently.

If a suspect refuses to give a handwriting sample, the forensic scientist will have to try to find other sources of the suspect's handwriting from letters, registrations, etc.

Many times when someone tries to disguise their style of writing they write faster than normal, are deliberately careless, or write smaller or larger than they normally do. They may also try to change the slant of their writing. They may print instead of write, or they may change the hand they write with. But, if the forensic scientist has enough handwriting samples from the suspect, he can usually determine whether or not the suspect has written certain documents.